

House Republican Press Release

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Is It May Already?



By State Representative John J. Ryan

I am very pleased that it is a weekday, and I am actually here in Darien. While that might seem unremarkable to you, I am happy not to be commuting to the State Capitol again today, where the General Assembly had been in session for 15 of the last 17 (including the 10 last in a row - that's correct, the Legislature works on both Saturday and Sunday in the home stretch!) days of this year's Session.

Was it a success or another fizzle? (As a follow-up to my last column, I was tempted to use the last lines of T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, but if Federal Judges are using Eliot quotes in sentencing terrorists, maybe we have given Eliot enough exposure for now.) I suggest that one can only judge fairly what happened if you ignore the political campaign claims, and keep in mind the basic rules of how your Legislature works.

So if you are a new reader, or have somehow forgotten the ground rules, here is a very quick summary. The Governor, M. Jodi Rell, a Republican, started off this year's Session with her annual Address and proposed budget; the General Assembly, controlled by a large Democrat majority (24 of the 36 State Senators and 99 of the 151 House) drafts, hears and passes legislation, including the budget. As is normally the case in any parliamentary system, the majority controls committees, committee chairs, and the agenda.

With that context in mind, how to evaluate what happened in Hartford this year? We will discuss all of this in greater detail in the future, but for a quick recap:

- The Budget: I will not repeat the bad news of the Democrat-party-line Appropriations Committee budget as we outlined in the April 13 edition (STILL not paying Attention? Part 2); suffice it to say that the final budget was not over the spending cap, did not spend nearly all of the impending surplus, made the timely payment to the Teachers' Pension Fund, and a larger 'Rainy Day fund' payment than the Appropriations Committee budget, and a few other good points. To over-simplify, the final budget adopted was closer to the Governor's proposal than the Appropriations Committee version, which is good news.

But.....

- Car tax elimination?": as I predicted, Governor Rell's proposal for this tax cut was totally unacceptable to the Democrat majority and did not make the budget.
- Estate tax phaseout? Estate Tax elimination? Adjustment of Estate Tax "cliff" ? See the Car Tax above; we Republicans called amendments on these topics, and all were defeated on "close-to", or party-line votes.
- Eminent domain: remember all of the news stories and discussion on this topic; all of the "public forum" events after the well publicized U.S. Supreme Court case about New London ? Are you surprised that the majority did not even call a bill on this topic in the House? We expected this, and had a Republican amendment prepared in the event any appropriate bill would be called on this important topic, and take a wild guess on what happened?
- Gas "zone pricing": did you see those press conferences at gas stations with (Democrat) legislators calling for gas price relief? Are you surprised to learn that (once again) no bill on this was called in the House? You will note that even Attorney General Blumenthal is unhappy about this one!
- Jessica's Law: a bill for GPS tracking of sex offenders, and providing for minimum sentencing provisions again was not even called in the House.
- ECS funding: you of course remember all of the rhetoric and press conferences on how the majority would bring "fair education funding" to our area ? Nothing happened.

There was more good news on transportation funding this year, there were some business tax cuts, there was some economic development progress, but this is the quick version of what did and didn't happen. In my view, given the large Democrat majorities, Governor Rell (and her "budget czar" our former State Senator Bob Genuario) did very well indeed get these results. We have plenty of topics to cover in future columns!

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.ct.gov or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.